we grow
anyway

We Grow Anyway

queer poets explore love, growth, and survival

Editors

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Letter from the Editors

This book is, above all else, the manifestation of a love story.

We were but two queer slam poets, adrift in a sea of slam poets who found one another and started a beautiful friendship. After many conversations about being queer poets, about spaces where we felt our traumas were valued over our joys, about places where we felt pieces of our identities were less welcome— some of our stories were, perhaps, not easy to digest and understand— an idea was born.

That idea truly came to be at a specifically queer competition. The thought of going "home" felt heavy. In a way, this was our "home," within the safety of words and truths spoken by other queer bodies. We didn't want to leave the feeling of belonging, of safety, of acceptance, of "home". We wanted to take it with us. We wanted something to sustain us in our home cities as we built community and worked toward social and restorative justice in a frequently inhospitable world.

This book is a gift to ourselves, an act of self love born of queer friendship.

Above all else, we hope you find safety and understanding here, a love story for yourself and those you hold most dear.

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velociraptor

Aly Richardson

for every career day growing up
i would wear a labcoat
and carry a paintbrush
to dust off the rocks and tree roots
in the school playground
teachers asked me
what i would be when i grew up
as though any second-grader
has a fathomable concept
of life as an adult
but i held up a rock
with a trilobite imprint
and said with all the confidence
of a blossoming
transgender seven-year-old

paleontologist
that i wanted to study dinosaur bones
but i was lying

because even though dinosaurs
and their fossils fascinated me
even though i was terrified of horror films
but still watched jurassic park
with the lights off
every night for a month
and even though i could say
Micropachycephalosaurus
without blinking
i didn't want to be a paleontologist

i wanted to be a fucking velociraptor

it was my second choice
after i was told i couldn't be a mother
and i didn't know then
one was tied to the other
like the warmth i could already
feel in my stomach giving way
to this cold-blooded killer
with six-inch claws poking out my toes
stalking through fields and forests
packs of clever girls
because like women
raptors are survivors

hunting the hunters
the men who would contain us

why do men always expect
so little of us anyway?
i'm a velociraptor
i can open doors for myself
thank you
i don't need to be walked to the car
you know why people don't try
to assault a velociraptor?
why don't you come find out

of course i knew at seven years old
that i would never become
an impossible dream
because growing up
requires sacrifice
i never grew a tail
i never grew a womb
i never grew into a body
that would sooner choke itself than blossom
and every scrap of me that i call my own
has been won with my words
not my claws

so maybe they're right
maybe my body will always be a dinosaur
an oddity that doesn't belong in this world
consumed like a side show and then forgotten

or maybe there will be a scene
where a paleontologist finds a nest
filled with eggshells
and realizes that life finds a way
that i found a way
that mother
and my body
are not mutually exclusive

and that the world is filled with velociraptors

my gender is a language i cannot speak yet

after ashe vernon

TaneshaNicole

and is that not the most beautiful thing?
that all i am cannot be held in a mouth
that's mastered letter combinations and syllables.
cannot be spat out at one's earliest convenience
when
it's no longer socially acceptable to carry this much
unknown
beneath a tongue. no longer easy
to hide my everything between teeth and
call it 'delicate' or 'girl' or 'thing'

we cannot swallow. gender is a dead
language we only speak the binary of because
1's and 0's are wholly-human enough
they are the same in every trans-
lation. and what good is all this femme
if not to be consumed? serve as sustenance
for those that regulate the realities of my existence
in the same breath as calling themselves 'ally'
to a community so other, so

queer there is no word for it. no origin of
language can put this much body
into dictionary. and now we are the
language makers. we, in bodies too big for boxes,
assign meaning to our queer. our non-binary gender
fuck your expectations. a language so large
it takes entire choirs to pronounce.

Astronomy for the Alive

Lyd Havens

So I guess this is another poem
about how grateful I am to still
be alive // been on this planet
nearly two decades & the sun's like
"holy shit, you fucking go" //
& the moon's like "you are one
resilient bitch" // & my mom's like
"oh thank god, I didn't have to bury
my oldest child like my mother before me
after all" // & my dad's like
"how old are you again?" // & I'm like,
screaming into the void, but in
the best way possible // and I guess
this is the science behind
staying alive: a constant, grueling study
of time and light // my hypothesis
was wrong // and thank the heavens for that
// or thank me, I guess // despite everything,
my body didn't quit on me,
& I didn't quit on me either. I've got
a whole sky to prove it.

things that can be a poem: a poem
Wil Williams

the seconds of tuning
in the beginning of REM's "nightswimming"
is your favorite sonnet--
and there's a tiny haiku living
in that pre-piano A+E pizzicato

your friend's mirror selfie, taken in their new home,
where
they are finally home, and it is
so far away from you, and so often you still almost tell
them
"come with me to the movies, i don't even
care which one" but
you know that this home, this mirror, is
the right one for them to see themself in
is a winding villanelle:
the refrains change tone in just the brightest way

looking at someone and saying, full deadpan,
"I Am Very Gay"
when actually you are a bi or a pan or an ace
or a ??? or a !!!
is a poem

sometimes,
a poem is a poem;
but really, more poem is the
writing of the poem than the
poem itself

a bagel with
cream cheese
and lox
and capers
and onions
and tomatoes
is the most epitomized poem anyone has ever read

a dog is, of course, a limerick, but
especially when that dog is the most
Dog dog you have ever seen

that Whataburger cup that says, at the bottom,
"WHEN I AM
EMPTY
PLEASE DISPOSE
OF ME
PROPERLY"
which every poet posts a picture of, captioned
"#same"--
who ever said instagram poetry isn't Real Poetry when
these posts exist, multitudinous?

hydrangeas, in all colors,
but mostly pale blue

the way everyone raised in the desert loves the rain
and
will tell you, for five years straight, about
the importance of the smell of creosote

poets looking at things and saying
"wow
that's a poem"

the elegance, drama, suspense, glory
wrapped up into the perfect package of a vine, just
6 perfect seconds long

(vine compilations, made up of 6 second clips, lasting,
i have seen,
up to one entire hour)

the tattoo your friend gets after years of debating and
years of wanting it, and of course,
it comes out just perfect

returning home

returning from returning home and reminding
yourself that
you live inside of yourself exclusively and
that is the best home you could ever hope to build

Guts
Kaleena Kovach

Today I woke up ready to break teeth with my punchlines.
Today was a bad fucking day and it felt hard to live in my body.

The train tracks of my rib cage
hold the things I wish I didn't know
and the ones I should've learned by now.

Across my gut, in size 200 font I've written
HEAL
So that it will stop biting its fingernails
and making me bleed.
I tell it, I'm trying to find ways to let go.

Today I am natural disaster.
I am hurricane winds snapping myself in half.
I am ocean breaking against the bow of my back.
But my cells are still here, holding me.
Thank you, I say, for not jumping ship.

I bought a canary so that her song would tell me
when it's time to leave my body.
She has not stopped singing.

Sometimes her whisper carries a promise.
If only I can find stillness long enough to listen.

This is what trying looks like.
Today, I am taking my vitamins.
I am eating soup.
I am writing poems.
I am writing a treaty to turn this battlefield body into my ally.

Trainsgender
Mackenzie Boyer

My brother says "you're still my brother, right"
Erasing the joy I felt just moments early
When the cis women at the party embrace me
As one of their own.
I was there right after long hours laying track
Driving spikes, shame buried under dirt and grease
I am surviving these days in moments of
Lipstick reapplied and lace in secret places
Polished nails under work gloves

The railroad boss says trans people are dangerous
Fallacies his way from surgery to suicides
I don't tell him about the dreams where my boy parts
Are separated from this beautiful dissarray
Instead I swing the spike hammer
This is the girliest job I could find, there is noone
stronger than a woman
There is glitter on the tracks

The mountain is a woman
She holds up the sky
Broad shouldered and granite heart
We speak the language of getting over
Getting through, raising up
I am raising myself
And this is my transgression
The audacity to live
all eyeshadow and floral adornment
Tell my brother I have always been his sister
Tell the foreman that rail ties are women's work.

I am a woman at work on the railroad
At work on myself
The cog trains have crawled up Pikes Peak since 1891
Trans people have always existed
And I am not crawling
I am lifting breaking building
Glitter and granite
Grease and get through
Diesel heart and aspen grove lungs

Swinging a hammer, still a woman
There are 20,000 ties that need replacing
There are 20,000 parts of me that need replacing
The railroad and me
The mountain and me
Are always in transition
I am glitter on the tracks
The most beautiful thing on the mountain

My Gender is:

(a b r o k e n h a i k u)

Cecily Schuler

A) a dragon

B) who

C) kidnapped

D) a little girl

E) a treasure

F) no

G) one

H) wanted

Free Bin

Blake Marcelle

We swap binary artifacts
In the living room,
Trading pretty reckless bits
Of repression drag
That turn into Christmas morning
On our "wrong bodies;"
Fitting corsets to new bloom
Skittle tits
And button fly boxers
To venus flytraps,
Muscle shirts for smooth arms,
Shaving cream for the girls
Who got blue announcements,
Jackson Pollocks on every wall
For the splatter-frames/
Boxes full of boxes/
Cubist queers;
Tracing erasure burns with sharpie,
Calling suspenders "our dapper,"
My old lipstick their "brash sexy,"
My stitches "her new shoelaces,"
His hand-me-down butch-babe button ups
Fit me just right.

Not gay as in happy,
Not queer as in fuck you.

Queer as in kaleidoscopes
Full of broken glass,
As in swagger in every pocket,
As in mascara and muscle,
As in gender-bender paperclips
Picking the locks
On pixie sticks and particularities.

As in glitter on your boots,
As in teach me bowties
And I'll teach you boyfriends
And we'll take turns shadowboxing
The toxic masculine bare fisted / borne teeth.

Queer as in asexual fort building,
As in problematic
Is everything but the dogs,
As in made up words for
"God damn! You look good!,"
As in your skin fits,
Borrow mine if ya get cold.

As an invitation
To tell me your real name:
The one invisible inked on the back of your neck
That you've read lemon juiced and backwards
In the mirror all those years.

210. Bodies in Motion

Kira Withrow

Even in my own body,
I am not only one place.
My hair streams directly from the Koykuk
and Yukon rivers
Still flowing bountifully after ambush
from goldpanners and smallpox.
My hair streams directly from Beaver and Boulder creek
Like irrigation ditches dug by my ranching antecedents
To water the animals and gardens that sustained them,
Continuing to bring me life.

The Niglaktak river shapes my hands
Which remember where my Selawik ancestors
caught fish to smoke.
My hands remember how to tend to creatures
Who no longer survive the wild
On foothills and mountain prairies.

Assaleeak, sweet golden brown fry bread,
is my summer color.
English, German, and Irish brushes paint my skin with
milk in the winter
To camouflage in the rocky mountain snow.

The town Kobuk, Laugviik in Iñupiaq, mirrors my
trading-post heart,
Where the red mud of Storm King mountain
Comes from the outskirts of Glenwood Springs
To exchange itself for new oxygen.

My limbs represent the passes of Anaktuvuk
Where my Nunamiut roots spread in search of caribou.
The nooks and crannies of Glenwood Canyon
Hide in the lines of my face
To tell the story of where Nana settled in.

The oars of the Unangax molded my feet which now
paddle the Colorado.

Some of my ancestors were nomadic upon the land
In the same way that I traverse the gender binary.

Some of my ancestors were settlers
Who did not know how to properly treat the land
and people
Because this knowledge had been lost
Too many generations ago in imperialistic movement.
I do not know how to properly treat
my body sometimes.

English has become destructive,
Teaching those like me to hate their path
By leaving us out of the language entirely.
We resist.

Na-Dené is a mother to the Diné language found far
South,
All surviving thousands of years to form my tongue.
Tayagigux, Uktasik:
My people have words for the body's
constant transmotion.
We resist.

The Hard Thing, Then the Good Thing
For Nathan, platonic life mates & my Loves
Karen G.

A litmus for love
is showing up
when begrudging staring contests with gods
don't work out.

In February
I was snowed in to a hotel with warm cookies
and my mother becoming corpse
under the Philly City Hall's yellow eye
that matched her jaundiced, liver failing skin.

In March
I found the sanctuary in a hotel with warm cookies
and chants of "chocolate on the bed, chocolate on the bed"
delirious with maniacal laughter therapy
after ten hours of driving by myself.

Laughter could never have been more serious
giggling could never have been
more necessary.

All the bullshit is always removed
when we are together.

We are two people who have already seen the worst
of what can happen to bodies
have lived
when we weren't supposed to
seen what weren't supposed to
so whatever the world has, motherfuckers
we
will giggle in that fist's face!

Self care is sometimes escaping to a hotel room
in a different city
so a world can be four walls, conversation
and scattered earplugs on the floor
crumbs, coffee, and whorey chata
with fruity bottoms,
where we can be as naked in our laughter
as we are with our experiences,
making songs out of everything.

From a year of grief
you spackled me together with laugh lines
like
"Remember this, remember this? Look at this!
This is why we still live!
This is what we do when it gets hard."

We hold hands,
Our scarred balloon strings to each other
and we tilt our heads and make silly faces
and tell each other we are beautiful
until at least one of us
believes it.

The year of mom ashes on my shoes
walking with my mom as remnant
you strung me along with beads of calendar countdown
until the next retreat
the next laughter therapy of hugs and bitching
until it became the year of
hashtag
#yearofnathanandkarenlove
year of doing a hard thing, then a fun thing for
coping strategy
the year of checking bases
the year I proved to my mother's ghost
that I would still have love
from the loves I've made
on my own.

I Say There Are Not Enough Platonic Love Poems and So I Start Writing Them

[After and For Linette Reeman]

Megan Amory

home. noun. pronunciation:
my best friend asks me on the phone
if this means massachusetts or new jersey.
a question of semantics:
is home is where I was rooted
or is home where I am routing.
I quantify my daily red line commute
against the backroads I never learned to ride a bike on.
answer: neither, I have not felt enough high tide calm
to call anywhere home.

home. noun. definition:
a place where I am not thinking about leaving,
where I will buy furniture without weighing it against
how hard it will be to disassemble it when I do.
home is where I do not midnight practice
the emergency exit.
where everything I own smells like sea spray and summers,
where I remember what warm stillness was like.

home. noun. theoretical example:
the first holiday I don't spend with family,
where you drive through a monsoon
and suddenly my apartment is flooded
and everything feels like the shore.
any of them. all of them.
point pleasant, with the boardwalk, and avon.
the beach that is technically a bay
but is three miles from my right-now address.
it is a bathtub where I am high enough
that the faucet ocean waves.

home. noun. real-life application:
half of my dna re-writes my blood electric
across what is, for the first time, too many states,
around language meaning that I will outlive my father,
a concept I knew only in sterile hypotheticals until now.
now it is midnight and you drive me to the hospital
hold my hand when I ask if, at one point,
he will have two hearts or no heart.
answer: neither, a machine will bridge the beating
explanation: I am already two hearts and no heart
and you are the only other person who understands.
you are the only other person who has a death-anxiety
that we live with because we cannot logic out of
and maybe that feels okay for once.

home. noun. a conversation:
everytime I drive from massachusetts to new jersey
my father warns me against the gwb and the gps
and I used the gps every time anyway.
this is where I have found an almost still, doing 80 mph,
between the then-bedroom with the blacklight
and the now-bedroom with the white sheets
where I am not trapped by either not-really home.
I joke to whoever is in the passenger seat
that I never take the same way back
so I will never be able to do this without the gps.
tonight I got on a bus without a return ticket
because I knew you were on the other side
because I can hear the music in your car
before I am even in connecticut
before I even leave my apartment.
it is the first time I am not thinking about leaving
before I even get there, it is the first time
I am not thinking about leaving at all.
like this I could walk these roads with my eyes closed,
play a game of hot and cold where I learn to trust
the sound of you singing somewhere, I swear,
I hear you everywhere now.

home. noun. definition:
I tell you every reason everyone has ever left me
and you don't, and we both wake up surprised we'd lived through it.
every night I will help you with millions of deadbolts,
until every click of a lock floods me like your laugh
and every room we are in feels like the ocean.
atlantic city, with the sunlight, and your eyes.
answer: home is the sound of your voice
somewhere, floating from around the corner,
and finally it's just you.

Ode to Hanging Up First

Linette Reeman

yeah mom, i know the roads are bad but
last year my friends and i drove from Glassboro,
New Jersey to Austin, Texas and i kept taking the
sunrise-shift, so i personally drove through the
entire state of Arkansas. so if i had to give loneliness
a face, it would be the interstate knife-wounding
through the rickety night or the single tree poking shyly
above the highway-barrier after three hours of nothing
and then again three more hours of nothing after that—
yeah uh-huh sorry we're going under a bridge
or maybe i'm just going through a phase or
whatever, sorry, it's kinda hard to hear because
this car is all gas pedal and strained seatbelt
and we've got at least another half hour before
the 24-hour liquor stores thin out and we're left
with the kind of night-sky where the town is
small enough to see the stars hickeyed clear across
the clouds. so this secondhand car is full of
trans kids singing, i mean letting our longing twist
and holler louder than the worry of getting pulled
over, and i guess there is that gut-punch irony /
all the ex-teenagers who want to sound broken and
healing in the same sentence / big enough to bully
the alcohol into giving us the night off / mom listen
to me, okay—it's not the absence of other people
that makes me lonely, it's the presence of myself /
mom i've got my seatbelt on but it feels an awful lot
like a noose / mom i've got the heat on and the windows
down and i'm only telling you this so you know
when i say i feel like i'm being wrung out or cracked
open or pried apart / you know i mean if i sing my own
coffin, then no one else can do it for me / yeah yeah
okay mom, i'll call you when i'm home / don't worry
i'm not speeding / i've got both hands on the wheel /
the music is being played at a reasonable volume and
i promise i'll sleep next time or when it's over or
when i'm ready or when i'm less lonely, o—click.

Ode to Scorpios

Mary McDonough

You ocean deep dance parties.
Cartilage skeleltoned and luminous.
You archipelagos.
Bedrock bounce sessions.
You, who the heart digests from the inside out.
You gut linguists.
You, smiling from between the legs of your own
heartbreak.
Blood running down your chin.
Tragedy fuckboi.
Snake swallowing a grenade.
Shoulders wide as a sigh.
Never stopped playing X-Men.
One regenerating mouth
Full of other people.

Hunger Moon
Charlotte O'Brien

Hard-white—
it loomed above us.
all the things fall away
from us,
up
leaves along Mission.

And the city

around us.

And me,
against the car,
to you.
A man passed by.

intent on
not caring.
as I closed my eyes
opening and
to you,

hair in my mouth
or a murmur—
ephemeral.

And later,
you
half-sated
neighborhood. Small little homes
snug on their block.

for you to join them.

What happened?
A comet shot towards earth,
close enough for us to see its emerald hue.
The moon

They named it snow
like longing

an ovoid body,
I felt

like the wind picking

beating
hard and fast

pressed
opening

You, unaware—

me, watching
Him, smirking
again
opening

like your name;
all of this

walked away
in the almost-morning

Slate-white. Sleeping.
Waiting

traversed the earth's
penumbrala.
but it was hunger

I'm holding

like a stone:
The fish died.
your wounds from a cat fight,
you said:

And the moon,
naked
above us, knowing
waning.

I drove away,

In the almost-dawn
I went home again,
unknowing
poised—
the sky, already turning

I slipped into bed,
next to my child
with her golden hair fanned out across the pillow and
her limbs askew,

unable to shake you--

to me,
thinking only of your taste
tobacco
of your fingers;
moving
slick

these facts
in my mouth

You showed me

I was caught up
between them.

loomed bone-white

everything, poised

caught up
in the earth's dark
shadow.

half-sated, half-caring,
everything,

stone-cold.

how you began
opening

in my mouth;
of my fingers
inside you,
with hunger.

for the road

Troy Cunio

Midnight
Is
My
Favorite
Kind
Of
Me

we sleep cities apart
and live in one together

we watched the stars together
but somehow these lights
make the night darker

you deserve everything
but all I have is this midnight

and I am not into public sex

but both you and I live with parents
it's less thrill and more necessity

we get to know every bathroom in town
that has a sheltered entrance and a door that locks

a romantic evening in
is driving 30 miles at 2am to an abandoned boat ramp
so we can do it without having to look over our
shoulders between strokes

we invent positions that are less Kama Sutra
and more bowl of spaghetti

and I pray none of my friends or family will need a
ride
because the whole car stinks of passion

even when I'm alone

I start taking the backstreets
so I can be on the lookout for abandoned parking lots

it's a lot like when I lived in that car

that summer when I got comfortable with loneliness

I spent months bathing in whichever bathroom
had the biggest and most private stall

I'd cover the windows with bedsheets to keep the
streetlights out
and the fear in
but if I wanted a good night's sleep I would drive out of
the city
until I could make out Orion again

my neck and back always hurt from sleeping in a
Twister position

wouldn't give rides because the whole car smelled like
unwashed stress

and those secluded asphalt deserts were the best
spots to get trashed and pass out in the driver's seat

Rumi compared love to being drunk
but for me it is more like sobering up

owning a car is a lot like being in love
in that there is so much you can do
inside of it

when I said in another poem
this backseat was enough for love /so why not
loneliness
I meant I always keep a guitar and a bedroll back there
no one else is allowed in

but how this car has emptied
of everything but you

how this car has taken on the scent of you
the way I have

how the odometer has started moving backwards since
I met you
and I too am younger high school aged again
I never saw anyone die I never tried to end
myself
I drink for joy alone I do not hate my blemished
body
we dirtbag together we cut class we drive
everywhere

We
Are
My
Favorite
Kind
Of
Home

Fuck a Salad
Lex Byrd

you hold my hands like over-
ripe pomegranate & I
ask you to take my fingers.

replant them
regrow them in
tap-water-mason-jar
beside your kitchen sink.

press your lips to the plumage
over my too-fast owl heart &

promise to bury my palms
in the soil of your nana's garden
when my roots have grown
too long

braces and nose rings
Max May Fowler

The weirdest date I've ever been on was in high school?
And I asked him?
By writing the lyrics to Carly Rae Jepsen's "call me
maybe" on an index card?
And sticking it in his sweatshirt pocket?
And then we made out in a theater?
I don't even know what the movie was?
I promise I'm cooler now that I'm gay,
I mean I think it was weird 'cuz I wanted to slip
the note in Joanna's pocket and not his.

I think this is why I want to talk about my partners
in front of my niece.
I never want her to kiss a boy in the back of a theater
Because she is trying to convince herself
she's someone she isn't.
I never want her to feel like that's the price of girlhood.
I wish I could go back
and tell myself to slip the note in Joanna's pocket.
I wish I had a gay auntie.
I wish the story of my weirdest date
Was one in which we locked braces when we kissed,
Or our nose rings caught on each other's,
I think that's the gayer adult version of braces

rose red, blood orange

Allen Serarini

"her breasts like white wolves' heads
sway and snarl"
-sharon olds

hot as
a quick fuck in the park at night,
their bodies moving in and out
of unison as shaky as my hands
trying to light my cigarette in the pitch dark
of a november outer-suburban night.

sudden rush of sound
from down the hall reminds me
that i am not alone
in my head, in the memories
of us lying wrapped in the heat
that occupied the space between
the comforter and the mattress,
in the shadowy depths of recollections
that never actually happened.

that last swell of transphobia in me
bearing its teeth at your hands covering the soft swell
of your breasts like baby birds,

but i would have given you all of me
in an instant, never have i known lust
like i had for your moonshone skin, no,

sweetheart, i still write poems about you
and i always will.

light our smokes with your fingers,
a flare of a match in the dark, and it's hard
for me, still, not to want you to kiss me
until i turn into the sun.

After Seeing a Facebook Post Proclaiming: Stop Romanticizing People who Hurt You!

Liv Mammone

But (the ocean/the ocean/she walked into the ocean/ sunflowers/she drove ten hours/she made the best playlists/she knitted me wrist warmers/her eyes were sun on bay water; her back, a nebula/i once made her come by text while her daughter slept next to her/ waves crested at my collarbone//with her, i was a fountain/birdsong//my poem tattooed on her tricep/ without her i'm a wrath animal/she's gotten a cat, i think, to replace me/i feel her hating and missing/ the stories/touch/we never took that fast drive/she said she'd hold my hand in the hospital/her chipped tooth/even the lack of her memory makes my bed dark water/my skin is made of beetles/she was going to tell me which old films to watch; teach me punk rock/first times never return/she risked so much/i promised/what does forever mean/what if/soul/is any one thing that lays claim to my soul good) how?

A Primer for Abuse Recovery

Abigail Swetz

1. Leave your abuser.
Sit them down.

Tell them you/they/we are done.
Tell them you/we tried.
Tell them you are worth more than name-calling/
piercing words/pushed up against the wall.
You are worth more than hit.
You are worth just as much as them.

They might cry or plead or yell or beg.
Get up off the couch. Leave anyway.

2. Let yourself be angry.
Don't turn that anger against yourself.
Don't let shame override that they were wrong to have
done what they did.
Don't turn that anger against your abuser.

It's not that revenge won't feel good.
It's just that finding yourself and living your full life
without/in spite of/after them
will be the best revenge you can find.

3. Find a place to stay.
With friends is best. Best not be alone right now.
You don't need to do this alone.
You've been living alone in your own home
living alone in your own relationship
you haven't been living.

Reach out and let people reach back.
They will give you a home for a while.
Don't stay forever.
Independence will be key in this process.
But it doesn't need to come the minute you shut the
door and walk away.

The time will come for your own home. For now share
someone else's.
Even if you never talk about the abuse their home will
hug you towards healing.

4. Fuck someone.

Have a one night stand. It won't be love or even
making it.
The sex won't be memorable.

The moment they ask
"How long has it been since you've been taken care
of?" will be.
You will tell them the next morning
"Never."
You will thank them for reminding you you deserve it.

You will leave and never see them again but you will
remember the care
and feel warm for the first time in years.

5. Start talking.
Tell someone your/their/the together truth.

It doesn't need to be everyone.
It does need to be someone.
It will be hard
harder than leaving
to say the words hit/whore/bruise.
It will feel like bruise but it won't be.
It will slowly melt bruise off your heart
so new tissue can grow.

You will feel shame but you will feel heard
and feeling heard will help wash away the shame
stained into you.

Talking isn't admitting. You have nothing to admit.
You did nothing wrong.
Talking is healing.

6. Breathe.

7. Take time. Take more time. It will take a long time.

8. Talk and listen and work and grow.

9. Believe in your worth.

10. And when the time comes to open your heart
discover you still have one and love yourself enough
to know you can love another.
And do it

That Love Thing
after the classic Spice Girls song
Charlie Petch

When writing about that Love Thing,
maybe don't write another
poem for your dildo Charlie,
Though it is your love thing,
it's starred in quite enough of your
work by now

Try to work in a musical saw part.
Because you don't know what
to say about love anymore
Or even how to talk about the spice girls
though you signed up to write this poem
Just try to avoid spice puns.
Haven't they had enough spice puns?
Don't be the spice pun guy.

Keep a few lines about why Baby Spice
was never questioned as a concept.
Why it was that the only non-white spice girl,
was named Scary spice?
These are those lines.
I'm happy the conversation has changed since 1995.

Wonder why all your talk of Spice girls
became which one you'd like to fuck?
Instead of who's the best singer.
Wonder how old you were when you started
being turned into a misogynist.

Attempt to play the song
on the saw to avoid talking about love,
or delving further into misogynistic
child rearing practices of your parents ,
or the television that actually was home
and talking to you.

Distract the audience further,
so as to not talk about love.
Claim your favourite
spice is mace.
My favourite spice is mace.
One can never have too much mace.
"Mmmmm this is good
But it could really use more mace"
"I like Deborah's cooking but
She's pretty stingy on the mace"

It's almost over now.
You've joked enough so that
maybe they forgot about that love thing.
You don't have to tell them
it makes you cry diamonds,
hide in blanket forts,
run as if being chased.
That the truth of Baby Spice is
What ruined you all those years ago
That Scary Spice
Is an incredible person named Mel Brown,
Who thank god is leaving her
abusive husband
like you never could
and now he's dead and you don't want
to talk about how he treated you.
That the scary one
was always Posh Spice who held your
stomach closed and your mouth gagged open
for you all those years.

That behind this spice rack of love thing distractions
Is a fear you will lose yourself in someone again.
That what you think is you being in love,
was always doglike blind loyalty
That the older you get the more
fear you have of someone
wanting to be in your life.
Because we all know what happens
To aging blind loyal dogs.
And look at you now
talking about yourself in third person
because someone asked you to write about love.

Or maybe I'm scared
Because I know,
I know that sometimes
It felt like dancing out of Cadillac convertibles
during heat wave traffic jams.
Like 5 part harmonies.
Like I felt pop star sexy,
in someone's eyes and it was
party with my best friends beautiful.
Like my stride those days was a back-up band.
Like life can be a music video,
and candy was never the sweetest taste.
Like maybe what's scarey, spice
is that this love thing
Isn't the bad news
I want it to be

Cloudburst (2011)
Fayce Hammond

"What are you two old dykes gonna do with a hot house boy?"
"Love him."
"Spoil him." – dialogue from Cloudburst (2011)

I never thought much of getting old
of pulling together a family
bred from my bones

around a large oak table
for / Christmas / Easter / My 80th birthday / grandkids
clamoring
or fidgeting or accidentally gluing themselves
to their seats with frosting
that couldn't quite make their mouths

thoughts of the end
of my life often stall
/ a black screen after the commercial
before the return of the show /
a noisy pause on my face
ambiguously ageless
difficult to read

cliffhanger

Once at a Pride festival
across the country from me
my best friend called
I saw an old lesbian couple
at the parade today, gray-haired
and holding hands and I don't know why
but it made me happy

I sometimes think that happiness
is a glimpse of a future
worth growing into
of seeing someone / who loves
like I love / who holds hands
like I hold hands / who finds comfort
in ways where I might recognize myself /
and to see them still living despite
all the reasons we might not still live

/ by our own hands / or ever more likely / by another's
and there they were
living
by their own hands
entwined in the other
and I love them

like I love Stella and Dotty
two old fictional lesbians living
by a lake reading the sunset to each other
and breaking out of literal walls
to love each other still
and live
surrounded by people who love them
ever more for it
not least of all
the young man unrelated by blood
but build by the road into their family

I won't spoil the ending
except to say that now sometimes
when I turn my mind to the future
I am stalled film no longer

instead a lake and a sunset
and some gray-haired person who loves
like me and finds comfort too
in the family we've built from the roads
we traveled to get here
and maybe it's Christmas
or my 80th birthday
and maybe there are grandkids with frosting faces
or maybe a collection of folks once as adrift as we were
but most definitely there is love
and love
and love
and love
and most definitely there is life
and it is ours
and it is ours

ELENA MARIA ALVAREZ RIERA CALDERÓN LEYTEVIDAL INCLAN COMES OUT TO HER MOTHER ON NETFLIX'S ONE DAY AT A TIME

Emryse Geye

& it goes pitch-perfect the way that only heartfelt, laugh-track
sitcoms can, but when Penelope Riera Alvarez tells her daughter

you should never be afraid to tell me anything about yourself
i am still ready for the unlikely (yet, i insist, not impossible)
moment when this warm woman suddenly goes cold. & after,

even though i know that there's no crisis;
that there are daughters
who have clement conversations with mothers
that would never love
them lesser, that this crucible climaxed without catastrophe—

i just can't shake the smallness in myself. the held breath of
my adolescence burrows into this mother's of course. i love you.
& i want you to be happy before ministering it across my years.

The Moon is My Favorite Lesbian

Denise Parry

At the anarchist book fair I stopped at the booth
of the Committee to Abolish Outer Space.
They thought I was one of them because
I grabbed a "fuck the moon" button
smiled and continued to a long awaited presentation
on Anal Terror.
They didn't know me.
Didn't understand the innuendo.

They didn't know that the moon is my favorite
lesbian.
They didn't know how much she loves,
loves when the women's rugby team practices at night
loves when we dream of roller derby
loves lovely lady goat farmers floral overalls
flannel wrapped warm
bowtied
femme
chaos magic drawing on her essence

I'm writing a letter to NASA on her behalf:
"Please don't send her any more men
They're not who she wants. "

If the moon wore clothes she'd wear suspenders.
Suspend our disbelief
of the existence of darkness

In all the nights of queer reverence.
Nights of holding hands on trampolines,
in the softness of rainbow blankets
kissing girls from the mountain tops
the best moments were with her above,
My most consistent love.

The Sacred Art of Leaving

Mallory Everhart

The sacred art of leaving
when there is
nothing more to sustain you is
nothing more than
looking up and
seeing the rain will not come and
the parched earth will
not grow anything for some time and
it is no use waiting for something that won't happen,
for the clouds to come or
people to change.

It isn't losing a battle to realize
you're starving, to feel
the wasting and decide that to leave is to live
this family land is not where you want to die,
choking on a parched tongue.
To be a martyr is not a virtue when
no one sees you hurting and
no one sees you hurting because
they're too busy writing their own survival
story to notice
yours is a tragedy.
No one will save you from
your own defeat but you.
No one can, with their head down,
mining the dust for a drop or a grain.
We're all sifting for something that
hasn't been there for years,
maybe
never was.

It's not defeat to say
I deserve to live, even if
it is not here, to leave
the grave your father dug himself and
learn the rhythm of your own feet
walking.
One foot in front of the other, back
turned to all the people who would have you
stay and die with them,
most of all the land, your
mother, who can grow nothing to keep you
fed but calls to you, weeping: my child,
I made you everything you are, would you
forsake me so easily?

There is air enough in your lungs for
one choice made
with one step, again and over again,
tears and sweat watering the barren,
may this leaving
grow something,
somewhere, for one of us.
May it be me.
May it be new.
May it be.

My trans body fathoms safety as a house w. an old gray armchair

Ewan Hill

& a whale painting over the stove
& the bed is untidy
& my friend stops by unannounced w. ripe apricots
& they lean on the bannister
& we talk about the weather, not what it is, what it
lets loose inside our throats,
& they leave right before we tire of each other
& there are fresh cut sunflowers on the kitchen table
& an untorn screened porch
& a climbing tree, the exact one from my childhood
that my parents cut down to keep it from
crushing our house
& the violent gender binary doesn't fucking exist
because we cut it down
to keep it from crushing our house
& I have never been misgendered, not even by a sweet
old neighbor a mile down the road where
our mailboxes
sit side by side beneath a eucalyptus tree,
not even by the well-meaning mouths
that love me most as they try
& try
& try
& my sadness still rattles sometimes
& when it does I wash my face
& put on all my blue sweaters
(there are so many blue sweaters)
& my breasts are a sacred neutrality, buzzing
in the fabric, peaked a
gainst the dying husk of autumn
& I sit
& watch the moon w. my cherry tomatoes
in the garden I planted w. someone kind
& I shake my head at the good dirt,
my overgrown city of earthworms
& I sigh
& I pray
& god is there in the booming weeds
& I ask them if I want something hard
enough, can I drag it from the ground myself?

This book grows arms to hold you. This book tells you all the sweet things your parents never did. This book knows that life is tough, but we are tougher.

A beautiful collection of poems, We Grow Anyway is filled with the kind of frank resilience that reminds you that even on your worst days, you are alive. This book makes you want to hug your best friend and punch a Nazi in the face at the same time. Full of tender, funny, and honest moments, this book has cut off a big old slice of queer and trans joy, so that you can eat and be full.

—Ollie Schminkey, Writer/Poet

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